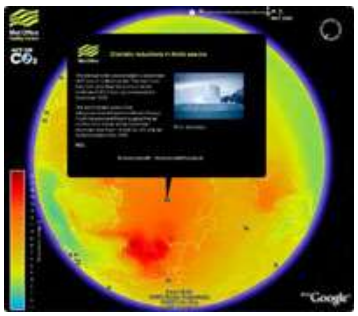
New vision of climate change through Google Earth

19 May 2008

Millions of Google Earth users around the world will be able to see how climate change could affect the planet and its people over the next century, along with viewing the loss of Antarctic ice shelves over the last 50 years, thanks to a new project launched today.



The project, Climate change in our world, is the product of a collaboration between Google, the UK Government, the Met Office Hadley Centre and the British Antarctic Survey to provide two new 'layers', or animations, available to all users of Google Earth. It was launched by Prime Minister Gordon Brown at the Google Zeitgeist conference today.

PM addresses Google conference

One animation uses world-leading climate science from the UK's Met Office Hadley Centre to show world temperatures throughout the next hundred years under medium projections of greenhouse gas emissions, along with stories of how people in the UK and in some of the worlds poorest countries are already being affected by changing weather patterns.

Users can also access information on action that can be taken by individuals, communities, businesses and governments to tackle climate change, and highlights good work already under way.

Another animation, developed by the British Antarctic Survey, show the retreat of Antarctic ice caps since the 1950s, and features facts about climate change science and impacts in the Antarctic.

The project is currently a snapshot of some of the recent scientific information about climate change and its impacts. The partners in the project will be looking to develop these ideas further in the future, preferably with additional partners.

Google Earth Climate change in our world

Notes:

The Met Office Hadley Centre is the UK's foremost centre for climate change research. Partly funded by Defra (the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs) and the Ministry of Defence, we provide in-depth information to, and advise, the Government on climate change issues.

British Antarctic Survey (BAS) is a world leader in research into global environmental issues. With an annual budget of around £45 million, five Antarctic Research Stations, two Royal Research Ships and five aircraft BAS undertakes an interdisciplinary research programme and plays an active and influential role in Antarctic affairs. BAS has joint research projects with over 40 UK universities and has more than 120 national and international collaborations. It is a component of the Natural Environment Research Council.

Environment Secretary Hilary Benn said:
"Climate change is redrawing the map of the world. Unless we act, its impacts will be felt everywhere, as sea levels rise, crops fail, extreme weather increases and more areas are at risk of drought and flooding.

"This project shows people the reality of climate change using estimates of both the change in the average temperature where they live, and the impact it will have on people's lives all over the world, including here in Britain. By helping people to understand what climate change means for them and for the world we can mobilise the commitment we need to avoid the worst effects by taking action now."

International Development Secretary Douglas Alexander said:
"Climate change is happening and it is the world's poorest who are facing the greatest threat. Now, for the first time, Google Earth maps allow us to see first hand accounts of poor people coming to terms with everything from floods and droughts to melting glaciers. Amidst the massive impact on the world's environment the initiative highlights the personal costs to people least able to withstand the changes.

"Global action is needed to cut emissions and help communities adapt to changing weather patterns. It can be done - and the lives of those in poverty depend upon the world taking bold action."

Met Office Chief Executive John Hirst said:
"Climate change is arguably one of the biggest issues facing the world today. Merging the Met Office's unparalleled climate science expertise with the exciting technology of Google Earth is a great way of bringing the impacts of a warming world to life."

British Antarctic Survey Director Professor Nick Owens said:
"This is a fantastic opportunity to use the power of Google Earth technology to engage people all over the world in the importance and relevance of Antarctica in the climate change story."

Ed Parsons, Geospatial technologist at Google, said:
"Google Earth brings stories to life and opens up their reach to a limitless number of potential users. We are really excited about the work of the UK Government and its partners to raise the profile of climate change impacts on a global scale."

Feedback on the content of the project, or any ideas for future animations or impact stories can be emailed to ourworld@defra.gsi.gov.uk.

For further information:

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